Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

JAN 26 1960

22
R312
.3

Research Note

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOREST SERVICE
INTERMOUNTAIN FOREST & RANGE EXPERIMENT STATION
OGDEN UTAH

No. 72 October 1959

POLE PRODUCTION IN NORTHERN ROCKY MOUNTAINS SLUMPS IN 1958

Alvin K. Wilson
Division of Forest Economics

Commercial pole production in the northern Rocky Mountain region[1] in 1958 dropped by more than one-third below that of 1957. A total of 340,231 poles was cut in the area in 1958, whereas 518,893 were cut in 1957. Although 1957 was the third best production year since records were started in 1947, 1958 proved to be the third-from-poorest year on record. This slump is readily recognized as one aspect of the general 1957-58 recession.

Table 1.--Poles produced in Montana, Idaho, and northeastern Washington, by species, 1958

Species	Montana	Idaho		Northeastern Washington	Total	Percent of total
		Northern	Southern			
	Number					
Western redcedar	4,142	106,180	0	16,717	127,039	37
Lodgepole pine	165,925	0	7,406	0	173,331	51
Western larch	8,960	18,394	0	9,798	37,152	11
Douglas-fir	2,600	74	0	35	2,709	1
Total	181,627	124,648	7,406	26,550	340,231	
Percent	53	37	2	8		100

---

[1] The annual survey of commercial pole production in the northern Rocky Mountain region--Montana, northern Idaho, and northeastern Washington--is sponsored by the Rocky Mountain Pole and Treating Association, Spokane, Washington. The Association contacts all pole companies known to be operating in this area. To make the report complete for the State of Idaho, additional contacts in southern Idaho are made by the Intermountain Forest and Range Experiment Station. Data published in this report are based on returns from more than 95 percent of the companies contacted, and pole production not accounted for is estimated to be less than 1 percent of the total.

Following a usual practice in recession periods, pole buyers tended to begin buying on a current requirement basis rather than on an annual requirement basis. This, in turn, reduced the incentive for building up inventories at poleyards. As the recession deepened, the heavy cutbacks in the lumber industry's logging operations also effectively reduced pole output in the important western redcedar areas of northern Idaho and northeastern Washington. In these areas, polemakers commonly obtain their stumpage in areas opened up by logging. When logging was heavily curtailed, pole stumpage became difficult to obtain. This combination of lowered inventories and scarcity of stumpage dropped western redcedar pole output to the lowest point on record, although it had been the dominant species in 9 of the last 12 years.

At the same time, two other recent developments helped to increase output from lodgepole pine enough to put it in the top position when production from all other species declined sharply. First of these was an increased demand created by stepped-up construction of rural electric and telephone lines, and the second was the growing demand from the building construction industry for poles to use in pole-type construction of barns, sheds, and other storage buildings. Both of these types of construction generally use poles that are smaller and shorter than the usual power line pole--sizes readily obtainable from lodgepole pine stands. Hence, it is no surprise that more than half of the poles cut in 1958 were lodgepole pine, and that more than 87 percent of these were poles of 30-foot length or shorter.

Table 2.--Total number of poles produced in Montana, Idaho,[1] and northeastern Washington by species, 1947-1958

Year	Species					Total
	Western redcedar	Lodgepole pine	Western larch	Douglas-fir	Other[2]	
1947	230,872	351,310	221,990	6,473	6,557	817,202
1948	212,785	138,099	90,879	5,419	804	447,986
1949	286,116	186,262	121,214	5,720	--	599,312
1950	217,049	92,338	71,651	9,070	--	390,108
1951	192,271	136,628	126,332	10,116	--	465,347
1952	217,721	104,621	152,761	19,049	--	494,152
1953	191,551	128,523	90,245	3,516	--	413,835
1954	138,624	101,842	36,938	768	--	278,172
1955	131,860	95,027	61,688	5,941	--	294,516
1956	193,393	236,655	111,268	36,334	--	577,650
1957	280,764	142,361	82,209	13,559	--	518,893
1958	127,039	173,331	37,152	2,709	--	340,231
Average, 1947-1956	201,224	157,130	108,497	10,241	736	477,828
Percent change, 1958 from 1957	-55	+22	-55	-80	0	-35

[1] Only northern Idaho is included in data for 1956 and preceding years; data since 1957 include all of Idaho. [2] Mainly ponderosa pine.

Montana produced practically all of the lodgepole pine recorded and also ranked first in 1958 production among the pole-producing areas included in this survey. Montana has been in first place four times in the past 5 years surveyed.

Northern Idaho's 1958 output, largely tied in with the production of western redcedar poles, slid to the lowest point on record, whereas for northeastern Washington only 1954 and 1955 showed smaller production figures.

Substantial numbers of poles are normally imported to yards in the region, particularly from Canada. In 1958, Canadian and west coast poles made up 27 percent of all poles handled in the area--somewhat less than the 32 percent they averaged for the 1947-1956 period. It is also usual for a small portion of the poles cut in the region to be shipped directly to outside yards without local processing. In 1958, 31,563 poles, mostly western redcedar, were exported directly to yards in the Lake States, Canada, and Colorado.

Table 3.--Pole production in Montana, Idaho, and northeastern Washington, and imported poles, by sources, 1947-1958

Year	Poles grown and cut in				Poles imported from	
	Montana	Idaho		Northeastern Washington	Canada	West coast
		Northern	Southern			
	-Number-					
1947	324,734	316,764	--	175,704	311,894	44,749
1948	166,856	205,035	--	76,095	187,975	39,094
1949	221,815	300,808	--	76,689	270,995	40,296
1950	148,473	180,410	--	61,225	213,371	12,788
1951	216,188	193,341	--	55,818	110,081	22,885
1952	181,985	223,777	6,000	88,390	357,449	22,237
1953	177,130	206,915	--	29,790	[1] 262,017	
1954	137,531	131,110	--	9,531	220,244	8,875
1955	138,260	131,281	--	24,975	77,017	54
1956	303,635	[2] 201,159	10,292	[2] 72,856	124,916	653
1957	177,979	[2] 242,946	9,995	[2] 87,973	181,584	0
1958	181,627	124,648	7,406	26,550	120,170	6,801
Average 1947-1956	201,661	[2] 209,060	[3] 8,146	[2] 67,107	232,759	
Percent difference, 1958 from 10-year average	-10	-40	-9	-60	-45	
Percent change, 1958 from 1957	+2	-49	-26	-70	-30	

[1] Imports from Canada and west coast not separable for 1953. [2] These figures differ from those shown in Research Notes 49 and 57 (the 1956 and 1957 pole production reports). Due to the difficulty of allocating production to state sources along the Idaho-Washington line, poles which should have been credited to Idaho were credited to northeastern Washington in these reports. The correct data are shown above. [3] Average of years 1952 and 1956 only.

Table 4.--Classification of 1958 pole production in Montana, Idaho, and northeastern Washington by species, length, and A.S.A. classes

Pole length	A.S.A. Class										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	All
Feet	Percent of total										
					WESTERN REDCEDAR						
25	1.97	0.48	0.60	0.97	1.48	2.11	0.44	1.76	1.93	0.03	11.77
30	.30	.48	.81	1.57	3.36	3.67	2.95	.25	.07	.06	13.52
35	.42	.57	1.83	4.48	8.96	6.12	2.26	.12	.03	1/ 0	24.79
40	.46	1.23	2.89	5.96	7.14	.94	.01	(2/)	0	0	18.63
45	.48	1.01	3.11	4.72	2.37	.02	0	0	0	0	11.71
50	.79	1.53	2.77	2.65	.18	0	0	0	0	0	7.92
55	1.98	3.81	4.35	1.49	.03	0	0	0	0	0	11.66
All	6.40	9.11	16.36	21.84	23.52	12.86	5.66	2.13	2.03	.09	100.00
					LODGEPOLE PINE						
25	.01	.06	.15	.38	1.40	4.83	8.56	1.16	21.18	27.53	65.26
30	.04	.01	.06	.21	.80	1.68	3.01	1.14	5.71	9.46	22.12
35	(2/)	.03	.09	.46	2.01	3.62	2.47	.13	(2/)	0	8.81
40	(2/)	.04	.29	.76	.96	.49	0	(2/)	0	0	2.54
45	(2/)	.03	.21	.35	.18	.04	0	0	0	0	.81
50	.02	.02	.07	.20	.01	0	0	0	0	0	.32
55	(2/)	.03	.11	(2/)	0	0	0	0	0	0	.14
All	.07	.22	.98	2.36	5.36	10.66	14.04	2.43	26.89	36.99	100.00
					DOUGLAS-FIR						
25	14.54	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14.54
30	19.63	0	0	.04	0	0	0	0	0	0	19.67
35	8.42	0	0	.22	0	0	0	0	0	0	8.64
40	10.45	3.80	5.21	11.07	8.38	0	0	0	0	0	38.91
45	.04	1.11	2.03	2.07	.07	0	0	0	0	0	5.32
50	.04	.22	.37	.07	0	0	0	0	0	0	.70
55	1.51	4.06	6.57	.08	0	0	0	0	0	0	12.22
All	54.63	9.19	14.18	13.55	8.45	0	0	0	0	0	100.00
					WESTERN LARCH						
25	1.00	.08	.27	.33	.17	1.81	.46	.25	.16	0	4.53
30	0	.56	.30	.27	2.26	4.88	2.56	.16	.45	0	11.44
35	.11	.26	.84	3.52	9.22	5.07	4.70	.03	0	0	23.75
40	.44	.88	4.19	14.54	10.60	2.18	(2/)	0	0	0	32.83
45	.27	1.48	3.78	5.72	1.97	.60	0	0	0	0	13.82
50	.19	.62	2.19	1.22	.69	0	0	0	0	0	4.91
55	1.47	3.16	2.98	.91	.20	0	0	0	0	0	8.72
All	3.48	7.04	14.55	26.51	25.11	14.54	7.72	.44	.61	0	100.00
					ALL SPECIES						
25	.98	.22	.33	.60	1.28	3.42	4.51	1.28	11.38	13.82	37.82
30	.29	.26	.37	.73	1.93	2.78	2.91	.68	2.93	4.77	17.65
35	.24	.26	.83	2.32	5.43	4.71	2.62	.11	.01	0	16.53
40	.31	.61	1.75	4.35	4.44	.84	(2/)	(2/)	0	0	12.30
45	.22	.57	1.72	2.61	1.21	.09	0	0	0	0	6.42
50	.33	.66	1.34	1.24	.15	0	0	0	0	0	3.72
55	.93	1.84	2.09	.67	.03	0	0	0	0	0	5.56
All	3.30	4.42	8.43	12.52	14.47	11.84	10.04	2.07	14.32	18.59	100.00

1/ Zero (0) indicates no production.

2/ Production less than 0.005 percent.